

USARSA Finds a New Home (1979-1984):

On September 30, 1979, the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977 was implemented signaling a retraction of U.S. power projection in the hemisphere as well as an uncertain future for USARSA. The school had occupied Building 400 on Fort Gulick since 1949 but would soon have to find a new home as Fort Gulick was scheduled to revert to Panamanian control on October 1, 1984. The U.S. immediately began to develop plans for USARSA's future, either in Panama or elsewhere.²⁶ The Department of Defense, in concert with the Department of State, had developed courses of action and negotiating points by February 11, 1980.²⁷ Preliminary negotiations began in June 1982 between tri-level teams of U.S. and Panamanian negotiators. Gen. Paul Gorman of the United States and Gen. Manuel Noriega of Panama headed final negotiations in late 1983, during which an insurmountable impasse developed. Panamanian negotiators, realizing the influence USARSA had in Latin America and wishing all vestiges of U.S. military domination removed, demanded complete control of the school. Also, the Panamanian mediators were under domestic pressures to ensure the U.S. did not appear to be dictating the terms of the negotiations.²⁸

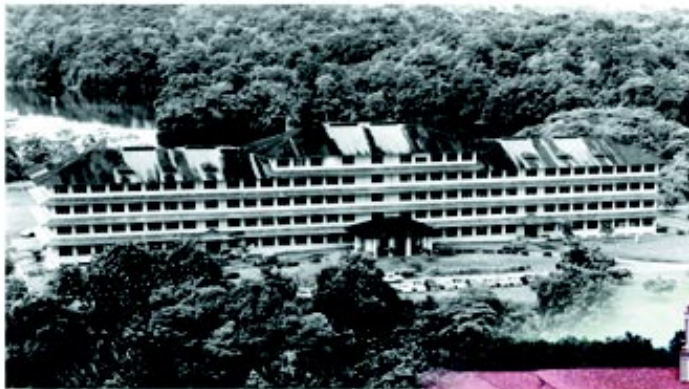
U.S. negotiators were not going to allow Panama to control a central part of executing U.S. foreign policy in the region. Additionally, the other Latin American countries were not interested in supporting a military school run by Panama.²⁹ U.S. defense officials reasoned that not having a school like USARSA would further erode the mutual-defense network that had been jolted during the 1970's. To accomplish the negotiating strategies of both nations, a compromise was brokered by August 1984 to create a new Pan-American Institute of Military Science and National Development di-

vided into two schools. Panama would run the School of National Development, while the Military Science School would resemble the old USARSA and be run by the United States.³⁰ The Commandant of USARSA at the time, Col. Nicholas A. Andreacchio, was tasked to develop the transition plan to close USARSA and create the new institute on October 1, 1984.

USARSA's closure seemed assured as the details of a draft *Note Verbale* were being coordinated and finalized, a press release was developed announcing the creation of the new institute, and the 1985 USARSA Course Catalog (printed in February 1984) even listed the division of labor between the two schools. However, Panama overestimated the U.S. desire to continue USARSA on the isthmus,

and during final negotiations, pushed for unrelated benefits for allowing the U.S. to run a military school on Panamanian territory. Panama demanded that the U.S. guarantee sugar quotas, a minimum-wage hike for Panama-

nian employees of the Canal, and operating and maintenance funds for the inter-oceanic railroad.³¹ United States negotiators were not going to be held hostage to such unrelated demands or allow USARSA to be a pawn in the Panamanian presidential-election cycle. Negotiations stalled. Inexplicably, the Panamanian negotiators were unaware that the U.S. Army had quietly been planning to move USARSA in preparation for the possibility that negotiations would fail.



*Mundinger Hall (Bldg. 400),
Fort Gulick, CZ.
Dedicated in memory of
Col. Robert G. Mundinger.*



*Ridgway Hall (Bldg. 35),
Fort Benning, GA. Dedicated in memory of
Gen. Mathew B. Ridgway.*

While USARSA operated in Panama, the Panamanian flag flew to the left of the U.S. flag. When the school moved to the United States, the flags were rearranged alphabetically, and the Venezuelan flag now flies next to the U.S. flag.



Throughout the entire negotiating process, the U.S. had been conducting a public-affairs campaign to convince the Panamanian population of the benefits of having USARSA remain in Panama under U.S. control. Cost-benefits' analyses were created and floated to the press, the mayor of Colón was brought in and briefed on the impact, and the U.S. State Department asked each participating country to weigh in and express to the Panamanian government their support for a U.S.-run school in Panama. A counter-campaign was being conducted internationally to force the U.S. completely out of Panama and further diminish U.S. influence in the region. In August 1979, the Moscow-based TASS News Service published and distributed, through the Latin American press, the first article labeling USARSA "The Academy of Torture" and accusing the school of holding back development and national liberation.³²

Negotiations soured as Panamanian politicians rebuked the *Note Verbale* orchestrated between Gen. Gorman and Gen. Noriega. Gen. Gorman had been given the authority to negotiate on behalf of the U.S. Government,³³ but that power was not provided to Gen. Noriega and remained in the hands of the Panamanian *políticos*.³⁴ The presidential-election cycle and public cries of caving in to U.S. "imperialistic" demands doomed the politicians' support of the *Note Verbale*.

By August 1984, amid stalled negotiations, the decision to move the school was made.³⁵ On September 21, 1984, under the command of Col. Michael Sierra, USARSA closed the doors to Building 400 at Fort Gulick, having trained 45,331 professional soldiers in Panama.³⁶ A month later, on October 23, 1984, the Secretary of the Army, announced the interim relocation of USARSA to Fort Benning and the "piney woods" of Georgia.³⁷ Col. Sierra executed the movement plan, and the school arrived on U.S. shores to begin a new chapter in its history.³⁸



Gatun locks on the Panama Canal.